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The U.N. Peacekeeping Scandal in the Congo: How Congress Should Respond

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I would like to address an extremely important issue—widespread abuses carried out by United Nations personnel against refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and how the United States Congress should respond.¹

I hope to shine a spotlight on a major scandal in the heart of Africa, which has until now received relatively little attention from Congress and the world's media. In the Congo, acts of great evil and barbarism have been perpetrated by United Nations peacekeepers and civilian personnel entrusted with protecting some of the weakest and most vulnerable women and children in the world. Congress has a vital role to play in helping ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. It is also my hope that congressional pressure will help prevent abuses on this scale from ever occurring again in current and future U.N. peacekeeping operations.

Exploitation of Refugees by U.N. Personnel

Personnel from the U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo stand accused of at least 150 major human rights violations.² This is almost certainly just the tip of the iceberg: The scale of the problem is likely to be far greater.

The crimes involve rape and forced prostitution of women and young girls across the country, including inside a refugee camp in the town of Bunia in north-eastern Congo. The alleged perpetrators include U.N. military and civilian personnel from Nepal, Morocco,

Talking Points

- In the Congo, acts of great evil and barbarism have been perpetrated by United Nations peacekeepers and civilian personnel entrusted with protecting some of the weakest and most vulnerable women and children in the world.
- This scandal raises serious questions about U.N. oversight of its peacekeeping operations and the culture of secrecy and lack of accountability that pervade the U.N. system.
- The U.N. has consistently failed to publicize, prevent, and punish the criminal behavior of its own personnel in trouble spots around the world.
- Congress has a vital role to play in helping ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and that abuses by U.N. personnel in peacekeeping missions are brought to an end.

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Tunisia, Uruguay, South Africa, Pakistan, and France. The victims are defenseless refugees—many of them children—who have already been brutalized and terrorized by years of war and who looked to the U.N. for safety and protection. The U.S. Congress should act to ensure that the U.N. personnel involved are brought to justice and that such barbaric abuses are never repeated.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has acknowledged that “acts of gross misconduct have taken place.”³ A draft United Nations report has described sexual exploitation by U.N. personnel in the Congo as “significant, widespread and ongoing.”⁴ In the words of William Lacy Swing, Annan’s special representative to the Congo, “We are shocked by it, we’re outraged, we’re sickened by it. Peacekeepers who have been sworn to assist those in need, particularly those who have been victims of sexual violence, instead have caused grievous harm.”⁵

The Need for Oversight

This scandal raises serious questions about U.N. oversight of its peacekeeping operations and

the culture of secrecy and lack of accountability that pervade the U.N. system. The fact that abuses of this scale are taking place under U.N. supervision is astonishing, and it is inconceivable that officials in New York were unaware of the magnitude of the problem at an early stage.

There are major doubts surrounding the effectiveness and scope of the U.N.’s own internal investigation into the Congo scandal, which was conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, headed by Under Secretary General Dileep Nair.⁶ A confidential U.N. report obtained by *The Washington Post* revealed that “U.N. peacekeepers threatened U.N. investigators investigating allegations of sexual misconduct in Congo and sought to bribe witnesses to change incriminating testimony.”⁷ According to the *Post*, the report also cites instances in which peacekeepers from Morocco, Pakistan, and possibly Tunisia “were reported to have paid, or attempted to pay witnesses to change their testimony.”⁸

The Congo abuse scandal is the latest in a string of scandals that have hit U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world. Indeed, it appears

1. The author is grateful to Joseph Loconte, William E. Simon Fellow in Religion and a Free Society, at the Heritage Foundation, for his advice and suggestions. Heritage Foundation foreign policy intern Nicole Collins assisted with research for this lecture. This lecture is based in part on Nile Gardiner and Joseph Loconte, “The U.N.’s Heart of Darkness: Why Congress Must Investigate the Congo Scandal,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 664, February 14, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm664.cfm.
2. See Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, “Sex and the U.N.: When Peacekeepers Become Predators,” *The Independent*, January 11, 2005, at news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/story.jsp?story=599626 (March 14, 2005); Jonathan Clayton and James Bone, “Sex Scandal in Congo Threatens to Engulf U.N.’s Peacekeepers,” *The Times*, December 23, 2004, at www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1413501,00.html (March 14, 2005); and Marc Lacey, “In Congo War, Even Peacekeepers Add to Horror,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2004, at www.defenddemocracy.org/research_topics/research_topics_show.htm?doc_id=253510&attrib_id=9594 (March 14, 2005).
3. “Annan Vows to End Sex Abuse Committed by U.N. Mission Staff in DR of Congo,” U.N. News Center, November 19, 2004, at www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=12590&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo (March 14, 2005).
4. Colum Lynch, “U.N. Sexual Abuse Alleged in Congo; Peacekeepers Accused in Draft Report,” *The Washington Post*, December 16, 2004, at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3145-2004Dec15.html (March 14, 2005).
5. “U.N. Outraged by Sex Abuse,” CNN.com, January 10, 2005, at www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/africa/01/09/congo.peacekeepers.sex/ (March 14, 2005).
6. United Nations, *Investigation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services into Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, report of the Secretary-General on the activities on the Office of the Internal Oversight Services, January 5, 2005, at www.monuc.org/downloads/0520055E.pdf (March 14, 2005).
7. Lynch, “U.N. Sexual Abuse Alleged in Congo.”
8. *Ibid.*

that U.N. peacekeeping missions frequently create a predatory sexual culture, with refugees the victims of U.N. staff who demand sexual favors in exchange for food, and U.N. troops who rape women at gunpoint. Allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct by U.N. personnel stretch back at least a decade, to operations in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. Despite previous U.N. investigations—and Kofi Annan’s declaration of a policy of “zero tolerance” toward such conduct—little appears to have changed in the field.⁹

The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)

Established in 1999, MONUC is currently authorized by Security Council Resolution 1493. It is the world’s second-biggest U.N. peacekeeping mission, with a total of 13,950 uniformed personnel, including 13,206 troops, 569 military observers, and 175 civilian police. In addition, there are 735 international civilian personnel and 1,140 local civilian staff. Forty-seven U.N. member states have contributed military personnel, and 20 countries have contributed civilian police personnel to MONUC.¹⁰ The MONUC Force Commander is Major-General Samaila Iliya of Nigeria.

The biggest peacekeeping contingents (based on September 2004 figures) are from Uruguay, (1,778 soldiers), Pakistan (1,700), South Africa (1,387), Bangladesh (1,304), India (1,302), Nepal (1,225), and Morocco (801).¹¹ There are no U.S. personnel serving as peacekeepers or military observers with MONUC.

U.S. Funding of MONUC

An issue of great concern to Congress should be the scale of U.S. funding for the Congo operation. U.N. peacekeeping operations paid for with U.S. public funds should be accountable to American taxpayers, who expect U.N. officials and peacekeepers to conduct themselves with honor and integrity.

The United States is the biggest financial contributor to MONUC, providing about one-third of its \$746 million operating budget. The U.S. contribution to the U.N. peacekeeping mission in the Congo has been substantial. If 2005 figures are included, the U.S. will have contributed roughly three-quarters of a billion dollars (\$759 million) toward MONUC since 2000, according to State Department figures. The U.S. is expected to contribute \$249 million toward MONUC in fiscal year (FY) 2005, and \$207 million in FY 2006.¹²

U.S. Funding for Worldwide U.N. Peacekeeping Activities

The United States is the world’s biggest contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations, contributing 27 percent of the total worldwide U.N. peacekeeping budget. The U.S. is expected to contribute over \$1 billion toward U.N. peacekeeping activities across the world in FY 2006.

During the past decade, the United States has made a huge contribution toward U.N. peacekeeping operations. Since 2001 (including 2005 figures), the United States will have contributed \$3.59 billion toward U.N. international peacekeeping operations.¹³

9. For further background, see Joseph Loconte, “The U.N. Sex Scandal,” *The Weekly Standard*, January 3, 2005, at www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/005/081zxez.asp (March 14, 2005); Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, “Sex and Death in the Heart of Africa,” *The Independent*, May 25, 2004, at news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/story.jsp?story=524557 (March 14, 2005); and Michael J. Jordan, “Sex Charges Haunt U.N. Forces,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 26, 2004, at www.csmonitor.com/2004/1126/p06s02-wogi.html (March 14, 2005).

10. MONUC, “Facts and Figures,” January 31, 2005, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/monuc/facts.html (March 14, 2005).

11. MONUC, “Military Contributions,” September 12, 2004, at www.monuc.org/ContribMilit.aspx?lang=en (March 14, 2005).

12. See U.S. Department of State, “Account Tables,” at www.state.gov/m/rm/rls/iab/2003/7809.htm (March 14, 2005); U.S. Department of State, “The Budget in Brief: Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Request,” February 7, 2004, at www.state.gov/documents/organization/41676.pdf (March 14, 2005); and U.S. Department of State, “UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC),” April 12, 2001, at www.state.gov/p/io/ifs/2001/2512.htm (March 14, 2005).

13. Based on State Department figures.

According to the General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office), the United States gave the U.N. \$3.45 billion in direct contributions to conduct peacekeeping operations between 1996 and 2001.¹⁴ This figure is dwarfed by the estimated \$24.2 billion in indirect contributions made by the U.S. to help support 33 U.N. peacekeeping operations in 28 countries during that five-year period.¹⁵

There are currently 428 U.S. personnel serving in U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world, in the Middle East, Kosovo, Georgia, East Timor, Liberia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Haiti. They are overwhelmingly civilian police, including 309 Americans serving with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. There are only six American troops under U.N. command (three in Haiti and three in Liberia).¹⁶

Questions for Congress

There are many key questions that arise from the current U.N. scandal that merit congressional scrutiny. For instance:

- Why has the U.N. failed to effectively prevent abuse by its personnel, given its tarnished record in previous peacekeeping operations?
- Why did the U.N. take six months to release its own internal report about the Congo abuse scandal?
- To what extent were the U.N. Secretary-General and other senior U.N. officials aware of the abuses by U.N. personnel in the Congo before media reports began to surface?
- Can the U.N. be relied upon to objectively conduct its own investigations into allegations against its peacekeepers and civilian staff?

- How can U.N. peacekeepers and civilian personnel accused of human rights abuses be prosecuted for their crimes?
- What measures can be implemented to ensure that future U.N. peacekeeping operations are transparent, accountable, and are run in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? What mechanisms should be put in place to ensure external oversight of U.N. operations?
- What impact should the Congo scandal have on future U.S. contributions to the U.N. peacekeeping budget?

Key Recommendations for Congress and the United States Government

I would like to make the following recommendations for Congress and the executive branch of the United States government:

- The United States should call for a Security Council-backed fully independent investigation into the MONUC abuse scandal, to cover all areas of the MONUC operation. In addition, there should be independent investigations launched into allegations of abuse by U.N. personnel in other U.N. peacekeeping operations—including Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Burundi. Fully independent commissions of inquiry should handle all future investigations into human rights abuses by U.N. personnel.
- The United States government should pressure U.N. member states to prosecute their nationals accused of human rights violations while serving as U.N. peacekeepers.
- The U.N. should lift diplomatic immunity for its own staff accused of criminal acts in the Congo, opening the way for prosecution.

14. General Accounting Office, *U.N. Peacekeeping: Estimated US Contributions, Fiscal Years 1996–2001*, GAO–02–294, February 2002, at www.gao.gov/new.items/d02294.pdf (March 14, 2005)

15. *Ibid.* The GAO defines indirect contributions as “U.S. programs and activities that are located in the same area as an ongoing U.N. peacekeeping operation, have objectives that help the peacekeeping operation achieve its mandated objectives, and are not an official part of the U.N. operation.”

16. U.N. figures. See also Marjorie Ann Browne, “United Nations Peacekeeping: Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, January 11, 2005, at www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/IB90103.pdf (March 1, 2005).

- The U.N. Security Council should exclude countries whose peacekeepers have a history of human rights violations from future operations. The U.N. should publicly name and shame those countries whose peacekeepers have carried out abuses in the Congo.
- The U.N. should make publicly available all internal reports relating to the Congo scandal, and outline the exact steps it plans to take to prevent the sexual exploitation of refugees in both existing and future U.N. peacekeeping operations.
- An external oversight body—completely independent of the U.N. bureaucracy and staffed by non-U.N. officials (but backed by a Security Council mandate)—should be established to act as a watchdog over U.N. operations, including humanitarian programs and peacekeeping operations.
- The United States should also set up its own U.N. oversight unit, answerable to Congress and specifically charged with monitoring the use of American contributions to United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This could be funded by diverting part of the annual U.S.-assessed contribution for the United Nations.
- Congress should withhold a percentage of the U.S. contribution to U.N. peacekeeping operations unless U.N. personnel responsible for criminal activity are brought to justice, and safeguards are put in place to prevent future abuses from taking place.
- Serious consideration should be given to the establishment of an elite training academy for

U.N. peacekeeping commanders. This effort should be backed by the U.N. Security Council.

Conclusion

The Congo episode has further undermined the credibility of the United Nations and raises serious questions regarding the effectiveness of the U.N.'s leadership and the U.N.'s Office of Internal Oversight Services. The U.N. has consistently failed to publicize, prevent, and punish the criminal behavior of its own personnel in trouble spots around the world. Congress should make it clear to the United Nations that continued robust U.S. funding of U.N. peacekeeping will be contingent upon the elimination of all forms of abuse within its peacekeeping operations.

The sexual abuse scandal in the Congo makes a mockery of the U.N.'s professed commitment to uphold basic human rights. U.N. peacekeepers and the civilian personnel who work with them should be symbols of the international community's commitment to protecting the weak and innocent in times of war. The exploitation of some of the most vulnerable people in the world—refugees in a war-ravaged country—is a shameful episode and a betrayal of trust that will haunt the United Nations for years to come.

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Appendix 1

Contributors of Military Personnel to MONUC (as of 09/12/04)			
Country	Military Observers	Contingent	Totals
Algeria	11	0	11
Bangladesh	23	1304	1327
Belgium	5	0	5
Benin	13	0	13
Bolivia	7	202	209
Bosnia	5	0	5
Burkina Faso	12	0	12
Cameroon	5	0	5
Canada	8	0	8
Chile	0	0	0
China	12	218	230
Czech Republic	3	0	3
Denmark	2	0	2
Egypt	28	0	28
France	5	3	8
Ghana	21	460	481
India	46	1302	1348
Indonesia	13	175	188
Ireland	3	0	3
Jordan	30	0	30
Kenya	37	6	43
Malawi	21	0	21
Malaysia	20	0	20
Mali	23	0	23
Morocco	2	801	803
Mongolia	2	0	2
Mozambique	2	0	2
Nepal	21	1225	1246
Niger	18	0	18
Nigeria	37	0	37
Pakistan	38	1701	1739
Paraguay	18	0	18
Peru	5	0	5
Poland	3	0	3
Romania	27	0	27
Russia	27	0	27
Senegal	20	459	479
Serbia	0	6	6
South Africa	13	1387	1400
Spain	2	0	2
Sri Lanka	2	0	2
Sweden	6	0	6
Switzerland	3	0	3
Tunisia	32	464	496
UK	5	0	5
Ukraine	16	0	16
Uruguay	49	1778	1827
Zambia	24	0	24
	725	11491	12216

Source: MONUC, at www.monuc.org/Contrib/Milit.aspx?lang=en.

Appendix 2

Country	Personnel
1. Pakistan	8,183
2. Bangladesh	7,942
3. India	5,154
4. Nepal	3,453
5. Ethiopia	3,428
6. Ghana	3,335
7. Jordan	2,929
8. Nigeria	2,884
9. Uruguay	2,497
10. South Africa	2,317
11. Morocco	1,704
12. Kenya	1,675
13. Senegal	1,575
14. Brazil	1,367
15. Ukraine	1,204
16. China	1,038
17. Argentina	1,006
18. Namibia	886
19. Sri Lanka	778
20. Poland	724
21. France	606
22. Chile	582
23. Tunisia	523
24. Ireland	476
25. Niger	468
26. Philippines	455
27. United Kingdom	431
28. United States	428
29. Austria	417
30. Benin	411
31. Russia	363
32. Togo	323
33. Canada	314
34. Sweden	303
35. Germany	296
36. Turkey	293
37. Spain	260
38. Romania	239
39. Bolivia	231
40. Peru	226

Source: Ranking of Military and Civilian Police Contributions to U.N. Operations, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/2005/January2005_2.pdf

Appendix 3

Worldwide U.N. Peacekeeping Missions	
Mission	Personnel
UNMIL (U.N. Mission in Liberia)	15,775
MONUC (U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo)	13,950
MINUSTAH (U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti)	7,392
UNOCI (U.N. Operation in Cote D'Ivoire)	6,224
ONUB (U.N. Operation in Burundi)	5,460
UNAMSIL (U.N. Mission in Sierra Leone)	4,167
UNMIK (U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo)	3,546
UNMEE (U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea)	3,364
UNIFIL (U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon)	1,994
UNDOF (U.N. Disengagement Observer Force)	1,023
UNFICYP (U.N. Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	959
UNMISET (U.N. Mission of Support for East Timor)	619
MINURSO (U.N. Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)	229
UNTSO (U.N. Truce Supervision Organization)	152
UNOMIG (U.N. Observer Mission in Georgia)	133
UNMOGIP (U.N. Observer Group in India and Pakistan)	44
UNAMA (U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan)	19
Total	65,050

Source: U.N. Missions Summary of Military and Civilian Police, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/2005/January2005_4.pdf.